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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL BOEHNER MEETING WITH
BELARUSIANS IN TALLINN

Summary

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Your decision to meet with leaders from the Belarusian opposition underlines continued USG support for democratic transformation in the country Secretary Rice aptly labeled Europe's last dictatorship. Belarus's increasing international isolation puts the opposition in a unique position to broaden its base of support. However, the opposition has lost steam while settling internal differences. One of your interlocutors represents the political parties that have remained within a coalition formed in 2005, and the other the camp of former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich. Points you may wish to make in your meeting include: USG support for democratic change has never been stronger; supporters of democracy should collaborate where possible, but work independently when necessary; and, active participation in the 2008 parliamentary elections must begin early to regain momentum.

End summary.

Lukashenko Faces Unprecedented International Isolation

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has recently been forced to reach out to international pariahs such as Iran and Cuba due his increasing isolation within Europe. In June the European Union suspended trade preferences to Belarus in response to the country's failure to respect basic workers rights. Even traditional ally Russia has moved to wean Minsk from huge energy subsidies that had propped up the Belarusian economy and Lukashenko's system of political patronage.

[¶](#)3. (SBU) During an April visit to Minsk, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Kramer delivered a very clear ultimatum that the Belarusian Government must release all political prisoners or face toughening U.S. sanctions. Unfortunately, six persons, including former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, remain behind bars simply for exercising their inalienable right to freedom of speech and association. As a result, expanded economic sanctions and travel restrictions on additional officials are under ative consideration.

Opposition Groups Go Their Separate Ways

[¶](#)4. (SBU) In the absence of a looming presidential election to unite them, the opposition coalition that formed for the 2006 presidential elections has frayed. A May congress formalized a split, with coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich opting to focus on his new "For Freedom" movement, which he hopes will mobilize non-partisan segments of civil society in support of democracy. The four strongest democratic political parties remain in the United Democratic

Forces coalition.

Opposition Needs to Coordinate to Expand Support Base

¶5. (SBU) Opposition coalition and civil society leaders know that they must reach out to convince average Belarusians to actively support democratic change. They face huge barriers in the form of authoritarian propaganda spread by the state-controlled media and a repressive security apparatus that targets those most active in resisting Lukashenko. Ideally, the United Democratic Forces coalition will develop a clear message based on bread-and-butter issues and begin campaigning all out even though elections for parliament are not due until October 2008. The opposition expects elections, like all those under Lukashenko, to be fraudulent, but they still present the best opportunity for rallying support against the dictator.

¶6. (SBU) For its part, "For Freedom" can play a constructive role by engaging civil society activists to promote free and fair elections. In some cases "For Freedom" members who also belong to a political party may wish to seek to run in United Democratic Forces primaries. The danger lies in the possibility that "For Freedom" will ignore the coalition and collect signatures to get its own candidates on the ballot to run against the coalition primary winners. Such a move would likely destroy what remained of the coalition and leave Lukashenko unscathed.

Your Meeting with Sergey Alfer and a "For Freedom" Deputy

¶7. (SBU) Sergey Alfer is a former deputy chairman of the United Civic Party, the party within the United Democratic Forces coalition most focused on free markets. Alfer helped write two of the documents approved in the May congress -- a strategic action plan and a draft interim constitution. The strategic action plan outlines plans by the opposition to use mass protests to pressure the regime into negotiation with the opposition.

¶8. (SBU) Yuriy Gubarevich is one of two deputies in Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement. He was a city council member from Beloozersk in western Belarus until fraudulent local elections in January. He is also a member of one of the constituent parties in the United Democratic Forces, Belarusian National Front, a center-right party that promotes Belarusian language and culture. He will likely seek to run for parliament and it will be key that he do so with the sponsorship of the United Democratic Forces.

¶9. (SBU) Points you may wish to emphasize in your meeting include:

-- USG support for change in Belarus has never been stronger.

Background: Bush's mention of former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin at the top of a list of prominent political prisoners last month in Prague demonstrates Belarus still rates attention at the highest levels in Washington. Assuming the regime fails to release the remaining political prisoners, the USG will move forward with toughened travel and economic sanctions against the regime.

-- Political parties and NGOs have distinct roles. Where possible, you should collaborate on some projects and work independently on others.

Background: The group needs to hear from Washington interlocutors that there are various ways to promote democratic change in a country, and political parties and NGOs both play essential roles. While each group may have a particular approach to mobilizing people, events such as demonstrations planned for the fall serve as excellent opportunities for collaboration. "For Freedom" should consider playing an active role in mobilizing civil society

groups to work together with political parties on certain projects.

-- Active participation in the 2008 parliamentary elections must begin early to regain momentum.

Background: While standing as a candidate entails facing intense pressure from the regime, members of the coalition should be willing to do whatever it takes to regain the momentum that it lost after the 2006 presidential elections. U.S. policy limits financing for individual political parties, but we can and will support a broad-based coalition for democratic change. "For Freedom" should not expect USG support if it bypasses United Democratic Forces primary procedures and runs its own candidates, thereby allowing Lukashenko to divide and conquer the opposition.

Stewart